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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000849

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: THE VIEWS OF THREE SOUTH-SOUTH CONGRESSMEN

REF: A. ABUJA 220

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On May 4, Poloff and Pol Assistant met with West-Idahosa Ehiogie, Emmanuel Deeyah Nwiika, and Olaka Johnson Nwogu, all Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) national House of Representatives members from Nigeria's South-South zone (six states in and near the Niger Delta). In a wide-ranging conversation covering many aspects of political life in Nigeria, the three voiced their opinions on the challenges of developing the Niger Delta, possible succession contingencies in case of the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua, and the state of the newly-created Niger Delta Ministry. While not all of the Congressmen's comments were in and of themselves noteworthy, or even logical, they were remarkable in the unanimity of their views and thus their comments may provide insight into the thinking of Niger Deltans, or at least that of their political leadership. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On May 4, Poloff met with West-Idahosa Ehiogie, PDP Congressman from Edo State/Ovia North-East constituency and attorney; Olaka Johnson Nwogu, PDP Congressman from Rivers State/Eleme constituency and chair of the House of Representatives Niger Delta Committee; and Emmanuel Deeyah Nwiika, PDP Congressman from Rivers State/Gokana constituency and member of the House Niger Delta Committee. Nwogu began the discussion with the subject of Niger Delta regional development, claiming that the Nigerian military and police Joint Task Force (JTF) was itself one of the biggest obstacles to development, given what he said was corruption in its ranks from top to bottom. He maintained that there is so much money flowing into JTF soldiers' pockets that they enjoy service there and try to extend it, despite the fact that most JTF soldiers are Northerners, and are at first completely out of their element in the swamps. He said the JTF soldiers are paid by the Federal Government, then collect payments from the State Governments, and are again paid by the administration of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) -- 5000 naira per day (about \$34) per soldier from the LGAs alone. He averred that they also demand protection money from businessmen; Nwogu said he had a friend whose construction company is working on a portion of the East-West Road who told him that he has to pay 9 million naira per

month (almost \$61,000) protection money to the local JTF commander.

¶13. (C) The three Congressmen claimed that President Yar'Adua meant well, but as a Northerner, was totally ignorant of South-South politics, the true polluted and underdeveloped condition of the Niger Delta, and how to effect change there.

They added that Yar'Adua is so frail that in his last visit to the National Assembly, his emaciated appearance "left many Congressmen literally in tears." They went on to blame what they described as the abysmal failure of the President and Vice President to effect positive change in the Delta on the bad advisors who surround them. The Congressmen said they were appalled that some of these political operators worked actively to prevent their bosses from getting a true picture of the views of Niger Deltans, and worked to persuade both the President and VP that all Niger Deltans were criminals.

¶14. (C) On reflection, the Congressmen said they believed Niger Deltans should have supported the regional summit that Yar'Adua had proposed back in 2007; the public nature of such proceedings perhaps could have forced at least some positive change, they argued. Instead, Deltans are now saddled with the Niger Delta Ministry, and given a "paltry" budget of 50 billion naira (around \$335 million), virtually all of which is being applied toward building the East-West Road. The three maintained that a Ministry backed by a minimum of 200 billion naira (about \$1.3 billion) could carry out serious development work, and could convince a lot of "our boys to lay down their arms."

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¶15. (C) Ehiogie commented that the Vice President was politically in a lose-lose position: if he were viewed as effective, he would be seen as a threat to the President rather than an asset, and if viewed as ineffective (as is the case), a buffoon. Either way, he speculated, people would want to get rid of him, which is a poor position to be in if, as Ehiogie believes, the Chief Executive looks unlikely to live out his term. In an outpouring of bombastic hyperbole, Ehiogie said that, should Yar'Adua die, unrest spurred by the prospect of a Jonathan Presidency might produce a military "interregnum;" another possibility was that Jonathan would be assassinated if he tried to stay in office, he added. The South-South, by contrast, would insist on Jonathan being allowed to take his constitutionally-mandated place as President, and might agitate to secede, if this were blocked by others. The Congressmen called the sitting group of state governors "the strongest Nigeria has ever seen," and added that it would be primarily the governors who would broker the outcome of a succession struggle.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Most observers would characterize much of what the three National Assembly members said as unbelievable, insincere posturing and bombast -- and some of it surely is. But both Poloff and Pol Assistant were struck by how uniform, unforced and "stream of consciousness" their statements were, especially when compared to most meetings with National Assembly members. Furthermore, they expressed some opinions that vary significantly from either the usual PDP party line, or the typical defensiveness Nigerians from any part of the country display toward outsiders, particularly foreigners. In any event, each at least gave the appearance of truly believing what he said, and generally said it with the support of the other two men. Within this context, we believe this conversation provides a window into the mindset of at least some of Nigeria's South-South politicians. END COMMENT.

¶17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS